Tells the Facts and Names the Names

CounterPunch

May 1-15, 2007 *Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair* VOL. 14, NO. 9

The Birth of the Military-Industrial Complex

America's First Terror War

By R. T. Naylor

America was under siege: its citizens murdered or held hostage abroad; its overseas economic lifeline threatened; even its flag desecrated by Muslims who envied its freedoms and coveted its wealth.

Some at home wanted to buy a shameful peace . But political visionaries knew the importance of standing tall before the axis of evil, and of rejuvenating the armed might that had been allowed to decay following a long struggle for the country's very existence against a superpower foe.

They also knew how to use a few dramatic twists of the truth to turn a crisis, real or contrived, into an opportunity to rally the nation around a common threat, puff the military budget, expand central government authority, suppress internal dissent, and defend the profitability of American business abroad, all with the vocal blessings of the country's religious leaders, while dumping the costs on the poorer sections of the population through fiscal manipulation in the name of patriotism. All this took place not at the beginning of the 21st century but at the end of the 18th.

American colonists who had just thrown off British rule were in no mood to concede instruments of potential coercion even to local leaders. For some former colonies, too, a less-than-perfect union during the rebellion had been just a wartime expedient en route to full independence. To create a real country, would-be founding fathers had three major tasks: instill a common sense of mission, stabilize central government revenues, and build a permanent military.

Yet the population at large was suspicious of standing armies and permanent navies, and of the taxes necessary to create or sustain them. Each of the first three presidents faced tax revolts, not least because the burden of new taxes on alcohol fell more on whiskey drinkers of the frontier than on wine-swilling eastern urbanites. Thus did the emerging U.S. Army find its first major task, not slaughtering Indians in the West or conquering Hispanic territories in the South or gobbling up remaining British colonies in the North, but enforcing a new tax code. America had its first War on Crime – a War on Terror would follow shortly.

The Navy was even more contentious. The Continental Congress had planned to build three battleships, but ran into enough delays and cost overruns to abandon the effort. Although the 1787 Constitutional Convention called for money to "provide and maintain a navy", Congress was full of penny-pinchers, and the public still leery. Fortunately a solution was at hand.

For decades, even centuries, respectable mothers and fundamentalist preachers had terrified their children or their flocks with tales of depredations by "Barbary pirates" and of the fate of any good Christian who fell into their heathen hands. Stories abounded of sumptuous palaces filled with gold, precious stones, rich tapestries, and captive girls (and boys) to cater to depraved tastes, paid for by looting merchant ships, or selling Europeans or Americans into slavery. Meanwhile, churches took the lead in collecting money to redeem hapless captives.

It was true that thousands of Europeans over the centuries, and some Americans more recently, had been seized by corsairs flying Barbary States colors. However the standard yarn missed a few things.

First, the corsairs were not pirates, by definition stateless outlaws, but privateers representing powers either sovereign like Morocco or quasi sovereign (*de jure* tributaries of the Ottoman empire but *de facto* almost independent) like Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli. They were merely following European practice. Since merchant ships often carried as many guns as smaller naval vessels, governments normally granted to their merchant ships letters of marque, in effect licenses to steal from ships flying the enemy flag; while naval vessels were given the incentive of prize money to capture ships and cargoes from the other side. If the same principles were applied to Muslims as to Christian Europeans, captured corsairs would be treated as prisoners of war. However, labeling them as pirates seemed to make them illegal combatants to be imprisoned in perpetuity, enslaved, or executed. Meanwhile, as laments about Christians in bondage poured from the pulpits, European privateers, far more numerous and better-armed, raided North African towns, seized Muslim ships and abducted survivors into slavery, with the enthusiastic support of the sponsoring governments.

Second, the Barbary States rose to prominence after the 15th-century *Reconquista* in Spain when anti-Muslim pogroms sent hundreds of thousands fleeing to North Africa. Early corsair raids were done as much out of a search for revenge for loss of homes and property and for the slaughter of family and friends as out of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a search for pecuniary gain. As so often in history, one set of terrorist acts was a direct response to a prior one.

Third, while living conditions of captives could be harsh, in some cases they were idyllic compared to those of Muslims taken by Christians. Someone of little economic value would be enslaved at hard labor, in which many would die. However slavery was neither perpetual nor hereditary. In theory, slaves could change their status by converting to Islam – something, curiously, which did not work in reverse for Muslims held by Christians. Not only did Islamic law forbid enslavement of fellow Muslims, but the Qur'an made a virtue of freeing a slave. Although no doubt some masters found ways to evade the law, many captives did "turn Turk", including a few who themselves became important corsairs. Nor was slavery a matter of race. Some from sub-Saharan Africa, once freed, rose to positions of power, even of leadership. Moreover, officers or well-to-do civilian captives had more or less free run of the cities where they were held until their ransoms were paid. The attitude of captured European sailors, too, may have been colored by the fact that so many had been pressed or tricked into joining their national navy or merchant marine in the first place. It may have been affected, too, by the fact that inside North African cities were colonies of European skilled workers who had freely migrated to seek better living conditions than available at home.

However, back in Europe, the Barbary corsairs were decried as the satanic scourge of some imaginary entity called Christendom (predecessor of today's Judaeo-Christian Civilization), which repeatedly tore itself to pieces in dynastic wars fought on the basis of race and religious denomination.

To the 18th-century American mind, Muslim became synonymous with pirate much as it would become interchangeable with terrorist two centuries later. Helped along by those images, money to redeem captives was collected with such gusto that in one instance, which would have warmed a modern televangelist's heart, there was enough left over to build a new church. Erected in New York at the corner of Broadway and Wall Street, it aptly captured that unique combination of faith, fantasy and greed, which would underpin so much American foreign policy in the future. Theaters along the eastern seaboard, too, were keen to get into the act, so to speak, by raising money to redeem captives from the Saracens, caricatures of whom strutted and pranced on their stages.

Fourth, rather than a growing threat, by the time the U.S.A. turned its thoughts to the corsairs, Barbary fleets had been in sharp decline for over a century; while the major cities of the Barbary Coast, lauded by some travelers as more advanced than those in Europe in respect for law and civil order, had found an economic *raison d'être* selling grain to Europe. Christian redemptionists still claimed vast numbers of captives in Saracen hands. But with galley slavery almost extinct, and other forms of forced labor largely outmoded, remaining Christian captives were taken mainly for political reasons or as prisoners of war. At the beginning of the 19th century, America held a million blacks in hereditary bondage; the Barbary States held thirteen white Americans awaiting exchange or ransom.

Fifth, far from having to deal with shifty savages, European powers found it easy to negotiate treaties to free both captives and commerce.

Some urged a course of negotiation. James Madison contended that it was cheaper to pay subsidies than to go to war. (He also worried that an American Navy might increase chances of conflict with Britain.) Others suggested that the U.S. hire Portugal, which for many years bottled up corsairs in the Mediterranean, to protect American vessels. But there were powerful voices urging a radically different response.

George Washington lamented: "Would to Heaven we had a Navy to reform those enemies to mankind, or crush them into non-existence". It was likely the first statement by a president of the "dead or alive" policy against Islamic terrorists which would figure so vividly after 9/11. John Jay saw further advantage in the war option to both "lay the Foundation for a Navy and tend to draw us more closely into a federal system". That notion of using an external threat to politically consolidate the home front would appeal in decades to come to other federal leaders, including Thomas Jefferson.

While generations of hagiographers portrayed Jefferson as a great pacifist, and those outraged by the duplicity of George Bush II invoked Jefferson's spirit as a counterexample, Jefferson shared with Bush a conviction that the U.S.A. was placed on earth to light the torch of liberty and to carry it around the world to places where, if people failed to show sufficient respect, it could be used to burn down their homes. Touted, too, as a great civil libertarian, Jefferson as governor of Virginia pushed for loyalty oaths at the time when perhaps one-third of the population supported independence, about the same preferred continued ties to Britain, and the rest were indifferent. Initially, Jefferson did not call for concentration camps for those who refused to swear allegiance to the new state – that would come later. For the time being it sufficed in his opinion to impose on them treble the tax burden of loyal citizens. Jefferson's Virginia, too, was the first place in the U.S.A. to empower the governor to expel "suspicious aliens" in event of war. When in 1785 Algeria declared war against the U.S., amid panic over a pending invasion and reports of "an infinite number" of U.S. ships captured (when not a single one had been), then-Governor Patrick Henry invoked that law against sleeper cells. After the militia rounded up two Algerian men and one woman, he decided (much like John Ashcroft more than 200 years later) to give them neither liberty nor death but to just deport them. However, Jefferson's most important legacy was probably his role in the creation of a permanent military machine for the U.S.

Editors
Alexander Cockburn
Jeffrey St. Clair

Assistant Editor
Alevtina Rea

Business
Becky Grant
Deva Wheeler

Counselor
Ben Sonnenberg

Published twice monthly except one in July & one in August, 22 issues a year

CounterPunch.
All rights reserved.
CounterPunch
PO Box 228
Petrolia, CA 95558
1-800-840-3683 (phone)
counterpunch@counterpunch.org

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"We ought to begin a naval power if we mean to carry on our own commerce", Jefferson declared. In contemplating the Barbary challenge, he added: "Can we begin it on a more honorable occasion or with a weaker foe?" And he elaborated, "These pirates are contemptibly weak", their fleets reduced to a handful of poor vessels with mediocre artillery and untrained personnel. That to Jefferson was a major lure. Jefferson also felt that it would be cheaper to build a few modern frigates, more powerful than anything in the Barbary fleets, than to pay subsidies. True, there were also operating costs to consider. To cover those, he proposed to hijack Ottoman vessels, kidnap Muslim passengers and crews, and sell the captives on the slave market of Christian Malta. Further revenues could be generated by selling the cargos stolen from Muslim merchant ships by U.S. frigates during the conduct of their anti-piracy campaign. However, Jefferson was not yet president, and the progress of the American Navy was slow.

Labelling them as pirates seemed to make them illegal combatants to be imprisoned in perpetuity, enslaved, or executed.

The turning point came when, with British encouragement, corsairs from Algiers began to seize American ships again. By invoking fear of the Saracen Hordes, the Washington administration in 1794 secured passage of a bill to authorize construction of six frigates and to establish a Marine Corps. Ardent militarists lauded the bill as the first step toward their dream for the U.S. to create a fleet so large that no other country could challenge it. The administration spread construction across major port cities to buy the support of several Congressional districts, a practice followed in big military procurement contracts to this day. Even so, only congressmen from northeastern seaboard states were enthusiastic. Hence the bill passed with a clause that required the government to also seek peace by negotiation, and to stop naval building if negotiations were successful.

Once again, construction was fraught by heavy cost overruns and long delays. Only three frigates were completed and still unarmed when, in 1796, the duplicitous chiefs of the rogue Barbary States had the temerity to normalize relations. George Washington had to halt construction even as he lamented the impact on jobs and the shipbuilding business. However the setback was only temporary. Something else on the geostrategic front put wind in the sails of the pro-Navy crowd.

Much credit for American success in throwing off British rule really belonged to France, which had supported the insurgents. In 1794, the U.S. showed its appreciation by striking a treaty with Britain to give the U.S. access to the British Caribbean. Revolutionary France, then under attack by a British-led coalition, took the American action as a repudiation of the Franco-American alliance. So it freed French privateers to go after American ships. The result was to drive maritime insurance rates for U.S. ships to crippling heights. With the eastern seaboard suffering a commercial depression and with phony fears stoked throughout the South of a French invasion, the stage was set for another round of naval construction, to the delight of New England merchants and the shipbuilding industry, especially since much of the cost would fall on western farmers through the whisky tax.

Reducing the potential for political division (East versus West; commercial versus agrarian interests), the construction program took place in the context of a virulent anti-French propaganda campaign. Under cover of the uproar came a series of measures – the Naturalization Act extended the required time for citizenship from five to fourteen years; the Alien Act facilitated arbitrary arrest and deportation of foreign-born males; and the Sedition Act allowed the government to prosecute criminally critics of its policies. Although the laws were applied only marginally before they expired, they were succeeded by the Enemy Alien Act which still permits the president to detain or expel anyone of age 14 or over who is a citizen of a country with which the U.S. is at war, with no hearing and no need for the government to prove disloyalty or danger.

However, skirmishes with French privateers were not the real purpose of the emerging fleet. And a war in the Caribbean to lower insurance rates was a difficult subject about which to write patriotic hymns. Hence in 1800, when peace with France coincided with the election of Thomas Jefferson as third president, the stage was set for a conflict, which would show the American flag in the Mediterranean, at Europe's back door, and help train sailors (and marines) for the next contest with Britain.

Joel Barlow, the consul who negotiated America's first treaties with the Barbary States, detested established churches. Hence he put into the Tripoli Treaty the subsequently notorious Article 11, which declared that the U.S. was not founded on the basis of Christian religion and that religion ought never to be a pretext for war. Cited in future court cases and inducing near apoplexy in generations of the Christian Right, this clause may have been inserted at the demand of the Dey (*de facto* ruler) of Tripoli who was fearful of America invoking its Christian heritage to justify an aggressive war against Islam. Barlow had striven to avoid war; but his successor, William Eaton, insisted that the only thing the Barbary States understood was "terror", something which America's new president was itching to give them.

When the U.S. violated its treaty obligations by cutting subsidies it had pledged, the Barbary regents, including the Dey of Tripoli (who ran the least important privateering base of the Mediterranean) were still eager to maintain peace. When a Tripolitan corsair took an American ship, the Dey secured its release – while the U.S. government reacted with dark threats. The Dey had negotiated on the understanding that the U.S.A. would recognize Tripoli as a sovereign power rather than as an Ottoman dependency. The U.S. had seemed to agree. While American treaties with Algiers and Tunis were written in Turkish, that with Libya was in Arabic, just like the U.S. treaty with the independent state of Morocco. But when the Dey asked for written confirmation, he received no reply. Further outraged when agreed payments also failed to arrive, he expelled William Eaton and cut down the American flag. Although denied by Congress a formal declaration of war, Jefferson took the Dey's actions as license to launch the first of what would be subsequently euphemized as "police actions".

During the campaign, the U.S. imposed on Tripoli a naval blockade, only

(**Naylor** *continued on page 6)*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The BP / U.C. Berkeley Merger

By Ali Tonak

Lying on a piece of foam, I closed my eyes, trying to find a brief escape from the cold, cement walls of the University of California Police Department holding cell. I opened them momentarily to take another glance at the white lab coat I was sporting, which had British Petroleum logos on the front and back. Even though my stay would be short, I took it as a welcome chance to contemplate the reasons why I had ended up there and what might be at stake for the future of UC Berkeley, the people of the global south and the ecosystems of the planet.

A few hours earlier, University of California Police Officer K. Moody was screaming at myself and future co-defendant Nathan Murthy: "Do Not Dump the Oil!" We were determined in our role as BP scientists and unloaded eight gallons of organic molasses, uncannily resembling crude oil, onto the front entrance of California Hall, which houses the office of Chancellor Robert Birgeneau and other top administrative officials making the unprecedented $500 million agreement between UC Berkeley and British Petroleum. Revealing was the charge that we would face after spending four hours in a holding cell: "Trespassing to Obstruct Business."

On February 1, 2007, British Petroleum set up a podium emblazed with its logo on the University of California, Berkeley campus to mark its merger with the university. Behind the podium stood California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, University of California, Berkeley Chancellor Robert J. Birgeneau, Director of Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory George Miller, Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign Chancellor Richard Herman, and British Petroleum-Amoco Chairman and its CEO Robert Malone. The press conference celebrated the sale of two public universities to the petroleum corporation BP. Over the next ten years, the public universities will be sold out for $500 million dollars. The public-private merger is being termed a "strategic partnership," to give birth to the Energy Biosciences Institute (EBI). The Institute is the vehicle for BP's entrance into the global biofuels market. Biofuels represent plants that will be cultivated and burned by converting the sugars in them to liquid fuel, allowing them to replace fossil fuels extracted from the earth.

While this group sat in a conference room patting each other on the back for a job well done, biofuels of the sort that are to be developed by UC Berkeley and controlled by British Petroleum are already taking their toll on the farmers on the other end of the hemisphere. In Brazil, where large-scale biofuels have been cultivated for more than 20 years, sugarcane plantations geared towards ethanol production have displaced thousands of families and are meeting fierce resistance. On February 19, 2007, two thousand rural workers organized through the movement of Landless Rural Workers and the Central Union of Workers, occupied 12 plantations in nine municipalities of the Brazilian state Sao Paulo. On March 8, clashes erupted in Sao Paulo between militants and the Brazilian police protecting Bush, who had arrived to sign an ethanol production agreement, the fruits of which would be destined for the U.S.A.

BP hopes to circumnavigate the worldwide rejection of GMO foods, since fuel crops will not be ingested.

Back at Berkeley, the university administration and British Petroleum are opening up the gates of the university to this oil company and laying the groundwork for the future of neoliberal biofuels markets. According to BP's CEO Malone, "up to 50 BP staff will be located at UC Berkeley and University of Illinois campuses, will work in partnership with the faculty and its researchers. BP and its partners will share governance of the institute and guidance of its research programs. We have chosen University of California and University of Illinois after a global search. Both have demonstrated a track record of delivering big science."

The Energy Biosciences Institute is quite possibly the largest partnership between a private corporation and a public educational institution. But agreements with industry are nothing new to UC Berkeley. In fact, this partnership comes almost on the 10-year anniversary of another deal worth $25 million that was signed with the pharmaceutical giant Novartis, which produced a firestorm of protest because UC Berkeley conducted research under Novartis' guidance resulting in propriety products for Novartis. EBI would not differ much. A specific area of the Institute, located on Berkeley campus, would be regularly accessible only to BP employees, and everything developed there would be the property of BP. The governance detailed in the proposal outlines that the Institute would be run by a director selected by BP, an associate director who would be a BP employee, and that 2 out of the 5 remaining seats would also belong to BP. This governing body would give direction to the research.

In July of 2000, seeking to greenwash its image, British Petroleum changed its logo from a shield with the letters "B" and "P" to a kaleidoscopic image of a sunflower and unveiled a new slogan: Beyond Petroleum. The deal with UC Berkeley is simply another attempt to greenwash. Oil companies have such a dark reputation that they have to buy out universities to show a gentler, greener side. A precedent for oil industry and university partnerships has been set by Exxon-Mobil's $100 million contract with Stanford University. BP is now following suit. On February 12, a BP ad in the *Wall Street Journal* stated that "developing new energy solutions requires new schools of thought" and continued to state that "…the Energy Biosciences Institute, the world's first integrated research center, would be dedicated to applying biotechnology to the energy industry."

Greenwashing works both ways: while BP tries to color its pitch-black oil slick with a veneer of green flowers and trees, Berkeley seeks the green of dollar bills. Stanford's fall from grace illustrates what Berkeley stands to lose as a public institution in terms of respect and credibility: on March 11, Steve Bing, a Stanford alumni and movie producer, announced that he would rescind his promised contribution of $2.5 million to express his dismay over the agreement his alma mater has signed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with Exxon-Mobil.

At stake is an educational institution funded by California taxpayers' money that exists for the benefit of California residents that is now to be turned over to an oil company. BP's maneuvers are grossly apparent. Last November, Proposition 87 was on the ballot. It would have taxed oil companies, generating $4 billion, to fund research into carbon-neutral energy sources. An alliance of oil companies and the Republican Party, to which BP contributed $3 million to their war chest, defeated the proposition successfully. The BP-Berkeley merger marks the exact opposite of Prop. 87: in addition to $15 million already promised from UC bonds, a letter tacked on to UC Berkeley's proposal by Governor Schwarzenegger promises $40 million worth of state funds to build BP's institute.

The EBI promoters argue that the BP-Berkeley partnership is indispensable for two reasons: 1. with global warming and rising energy demands, new "carbon-neutral" fuels need to be discovered; 2. with cuts in government funding of universities, relationships with the private sector need to be forged. The EBI is hardly the solution.

No alternative form of energy is going to rescue us from global warming. As important as it is to develop alternatives to fossil fuels, no amount of research can shift the course of the earth's climate in the coming years. Biofuels are not net carbon-neutral, since such cultivation on a scale that is being proposed (55 million acres by the figures of DOE/USDA) will necessitate immense number of petroleum-based fertilizers and pesticides, the use of agricultural machinery, and the processing and refining, and of course the transportation of these fuels across the globe, from where there is still arable soil to where there is an unquenchable appetite.

Most of these crops will be grown in the global south, e.g., in Brazil, Argentina, Guatemala, Columbia, Ecuador, Indonesia and Myanmar. Thus, we return once again to the streets of Sao Paulo where thousands marched against Bush's biofuel visit. Biofuels for the United States and for British Petroleum means the displacement of farmers in the south in order to fuel an insatiable northern consumption. Biofuel-destined crops are already creeping into the Amazon (sugarcane) and the forests of Malaysia (palm oil).

The magic solution to achieving carbon-neutrality and domestic energy self-sufficiency is said to lie in genetically engineered organisms. The EBI proposal claims it will develop "new types of lignin that are not known to occur in nature," and "create industrial-strength microorganisms capable of efficiently converting biomass to fuels under industrial conditions."

The fruits of BP's Energy Biosciences Institute will be millions of acres of genetically modified crops being planted across the globe. BP hopes to circumnavigate the worldwide rejection of GMO foods, since fuel crops will not be ingested. Should one have concerns about the obvious effects this project will have on the genetic diversity of the planet, the EBI proposal offers a solution. It terms such concerns "barriers that could prevent deployment" and states they will be overcome by the "modeling of social adoption" while "paying significant attention to the evolving regulatory framework and societal response to genetically modified organisms."

According to a critic of the EBI, Tad Patzek, professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering, UC Berkeley, and former scientist for Shell Petroleum, BP will be able to use the university to fast-track through environmental regulations: "Since the vast monocultures always develop specialized pests and pathogens, and their productivity declines, EBI proposes to identify efficacious agrochemicals and register them for use on energy crops. Registering a new agrochemical through a University may help to insulate its future corporate producers and users from legal liability."

Following the February 1 announcement of the BP-Berkeley partnership and the pending contract, a group of students, faculty and staff began to organize on campus to bring the agreement to a halt. Panicking amidst the growing opposition, UC Berkeley administration continued to expose its authoritarian rule with one blunder after another.

According to Dan Kammen, another principle investigator behind the EBI, the proposal will generate an "ecosystem of companies." This ecosystem, just like any other, functions through a set of symbiotic relationships. Many of these will unfold painfully in front of our eyes if the merger does actually take place.

One name in this ecosystem of conflicts of interest is the designated chief of staff of the EBI, Chris Somerville, who holds an appointment at Livermore Berkeley National Lab. Somerville is the former CEO and current chairman of the board of directors of another biotech corporation, Mendel Biotechnology, located in Hayward, a few miles south of the Berkeley campus. Included in Mendel's governing board is a former vice president of Monsanto, Steve Padgette, UC Berkeley professor Brian Staskawitz, and University of Illinois professor Stephen P. Long. The names of both professors appear frequently in the EBI proposal. Mendel Biotechnology is currently investigating *Miscanthus*, a giant grass native to China and the main target identified for cellulose production within the EBI proposal. In the next ten years, the participants of this merger will forge a full circle of contracts and discoveries.

Fortunately, the battle to defend the integrity of the public university is not yet lost, and a diverse opposition is growing by the day to stop the motion of the corporversity and the signing of the BP-Berkeley contract. CP

Ali Tonak is a graduate student at UC Berkeley and involved in the Stop BP-Berkeley campaign. For more information, visit: www.stopbp-berkeley.org.

SUBSCRIPTION INFO

Enter/Renew Subscription here:

One year $45 Two yrs $80
($35 email only / $50 email/print)
One year institution/supporters $100
One year student/low income, $35
T-shirts, $17
Please send back issue(s) ($5/issue)

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Payment must accompany order, or dial 1-800-840-3683 and renew by credit card. Add $12.50 for Canadian and $17.50 for foreign subscriptions. If you want CounterPunch emailed to you please supply your email address. Make checks payable to: **CounterPunch**
Business Office

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(**Naylor** *continued from page 3)*

to be profoundly embarrassed when the Tripolitan side captured the largest warship in the U.S. Navy with its 300-man crew. In response, U.S. frigates subjected Tripoli to bombardment.

Then came another striking victory. In a Cairo refuge, William Eaton plotted to replace the Dey with a pliable, exiled elder brother. Hence he led a mixed detachment of mercenaries and Marines across the desert to capture the weakly defended town of Dernah. It had no real impact on the outcome: the conquering force was soon besieged in turn; and the Dey, who had never wanted war, soon secured from the U.S. government a new treaty which reduced (but did not eliminate) the subsidies and gave Tripoli recognition as a sovereign power.

However, America's first foreign contest had an enormous propaganda effect back home, even inspiring the lines in the Marine Corps hymn: "…to the shores of Tripoli". Under the circumstances it would have been mean-spirited to point out that the only (briefly) successful U.S. forces were largely foreign mercenaries who came in by land to Dernah, several hundred miles east of Tripoli. For Mediterranean states, impressed by the Libyan military performance, there was no "shock and awe" from America's first overseas campaign, while its first "regime change" plot had been an abysmal failure. The American setback in Tripoli probably ensured that the U.S. would not become a colonial power in North Africa.

Furthermore, the war did nothing to curb Barbary "piracy", already a shadow of its former self. Effective action to suppress the remnant had to await conclusion of the Napoleonic wars when the British fleet returned to police action in the Mediterranean. On a world scale, the end of state-sponsored attacks on merchant ships came only after a mid-19th-century anti-privateering convention signed by the major powers – with the notable exception of the U.S.A. Nonetheless, in terms of the larger objectives, the war was a brilliant success. By drawing on the Islamophobia deeply embedded in the western consciousness since the Crusades, the Barbary campaign rallied the new nation against the Saracen hordes in much the way the Bush administration capitalized on 9/11.

The first American war against Islamic terror also set an important precedent for future leaders to use foreign crises, sometimes real, often exaggerated, on occasion contrived, and usually blamed on evil aliens, to project power abroad while serving at home to mold opinion, suppress dissent, and justify an expansion of state authority.

It served, too, to justify major changes in the fiscal system and perhaps somewhat placated whiskey drinkers (yesterday's lower-income taxpayers) for their sacrifice, or at least put them in the position where they would face accusations of lack of patriotism if they complained. This was a portent of the Bush-era fiscal revolution when the story about the enormously negative impact of 9/11 provided a pretext for an emergency tax-cut package to stimulate, not the American economy in general, but the investment portfolios of well-heeled Republican Party supporters.

The campaign also convinced the public and Congress that the Navy and the Marine Corps were essential, undercutting calls for cuts in military expenditure in much the same way that 9/11 would justify pushing the military budget above its Cold War peak, tearing up nuclear arms-restraint treaties and accelerating the militarization of outer space.

Similarly, it demonstrated at little cost that the U.S. could be a world power, even if the proof consisted of beating up on a marginal enemy with no desire and little capacity for war – another omen. Thus it gave America's emerging armed forces a critical boost in morale and training in preparation for foreign wars to come, which they did in seemingly endless succession, mostly against enemies as weak and reluctant as the Dey of Tripoli.

Not least, after 9/11, those intent on tough action could cite the (appropriately massaged) story of this first victory against Islamic terror as precedent to strike hard and fast with no concern about international law – since it did not apply to criminals or to terrorists, let alone to those who combined both vocations. CP

R.T. Naylor is professor of Economics at McGill. He can be reached at thomas.naylor@mcgill.ca

CounterPunch
PO Box 228
Petrolia, CA 95558

Phone 1-800-840-3683 for our new t-shirts and to purchase CounterPunch's new book "End Times: the Death of the Fourth Estate"by Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED